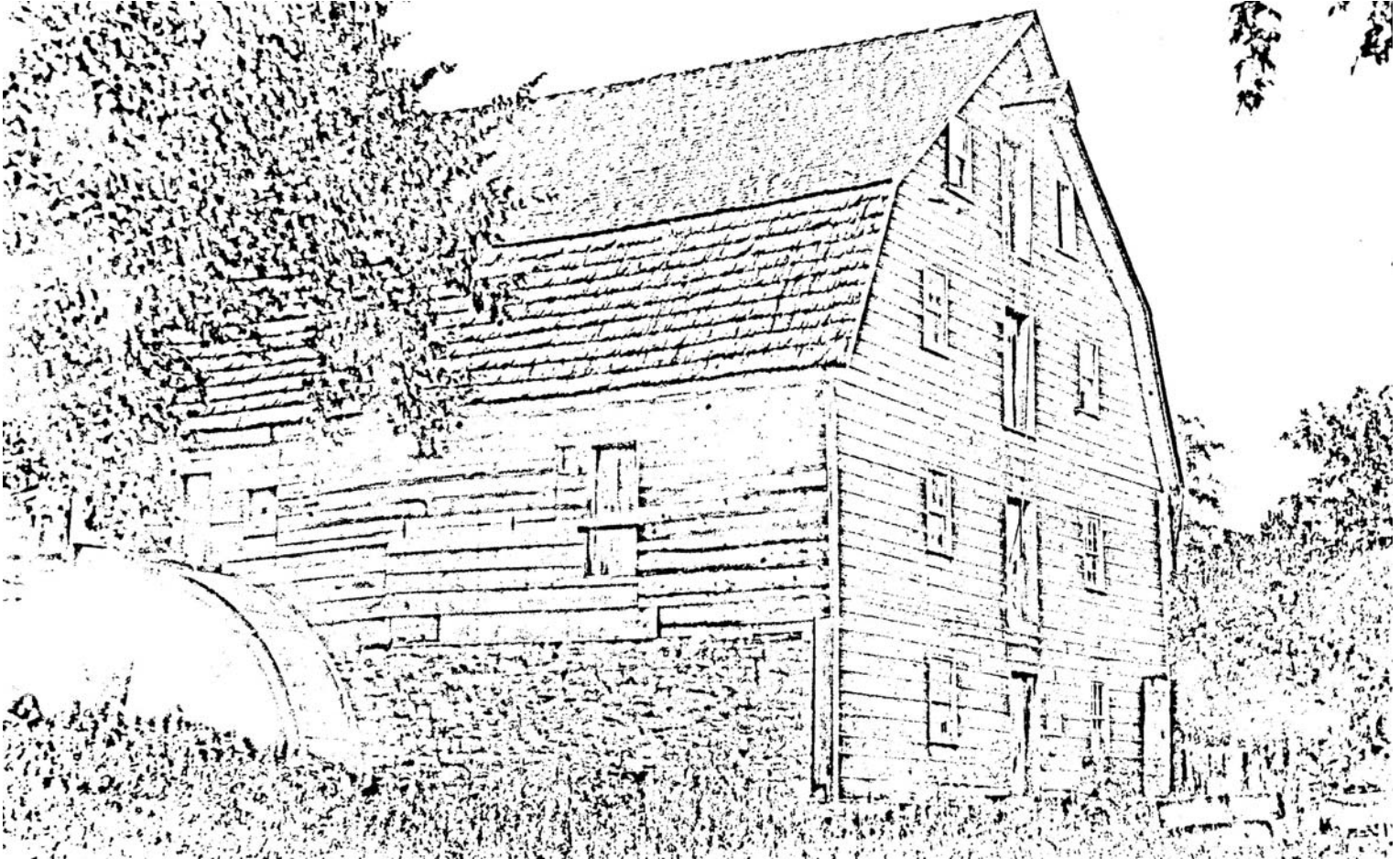




Towpath Detour



The C&O Canal towpath is closed from Dam 4 (Mile 85.4) to McMahon's Mill (also known as Cedar Grove Mill at Mile 88.1), requiring a short detour.

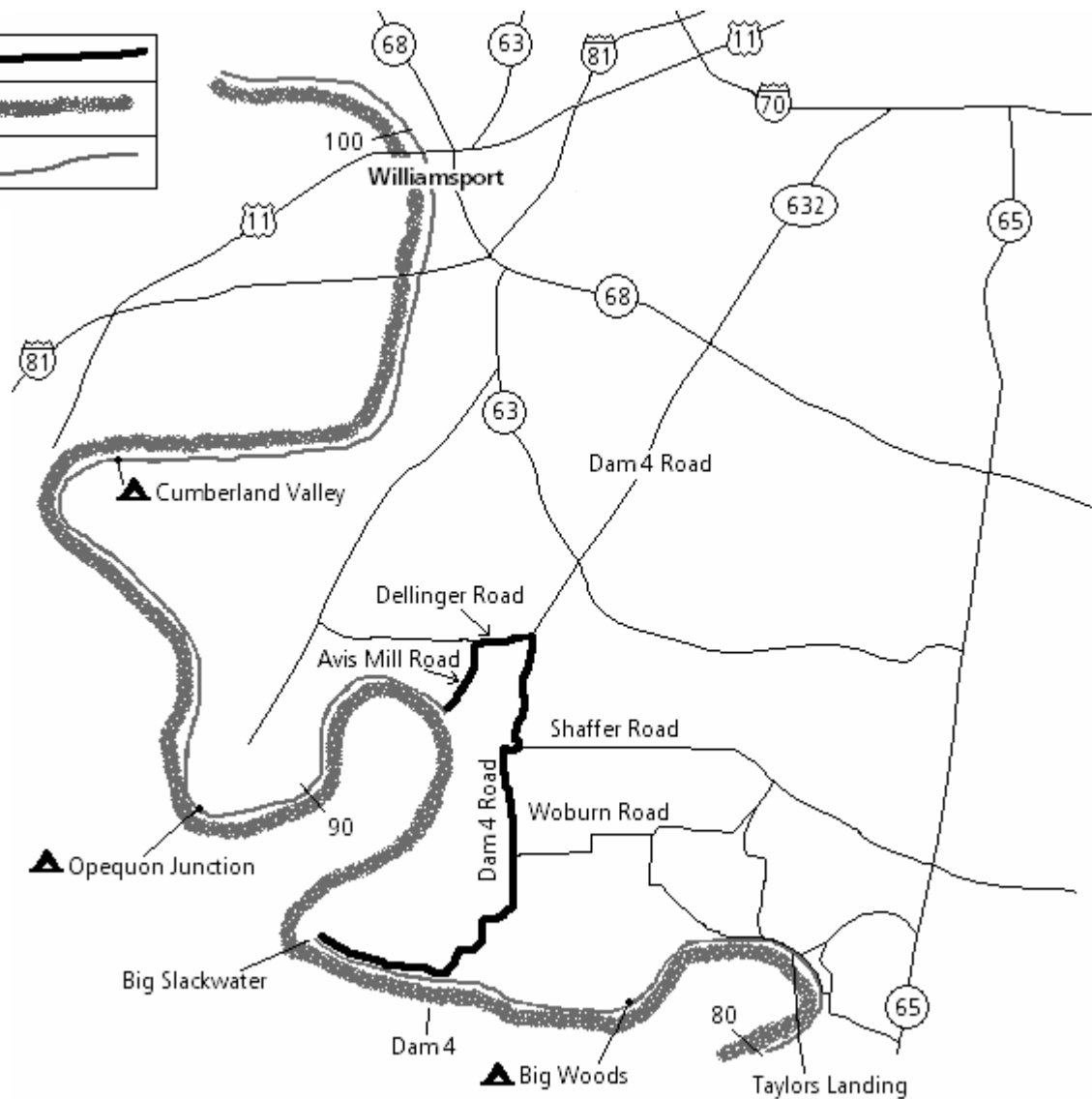
Big Slackwater

Dam 4 ponds the Potomac River, creating a 13-mile slackwater lake, or stillwater lake with little current, that could be navigated by boat, without requiring a canal. A guard lock at either end of the slackwater section allowed boats and water to pass from canal to river and back again. The towpath allowed mules to continue to pull canal barges along the slackwater section. Picture the freedom of navigating the open river, after many miles confined to the canal.

Throughout the life of the C&O Canal, floods, ice, low water, and other hazards made it vulnerable to interruptions in business and

trade. The power of the adjacent Potomac River made this both a desirable and fragile route for the canal.

For much of the length of the closed section, the C&O Canal towpath hugged the base of the vertical cliffs. The towpath is now unsafe or completely missing in this section. Because the cliffs drop into the Potomac River, there is currently not a passable foot passage through this closed section. Upstream from Dam 4 to Big Slackwater boat ramp, you can walk or bike the canal towpath for about a mile to the point where the towpath is closed.



Access the towpath via the dry canal bed at the bottom of the hill. Turn left onto the towpath to continue east.

The towpath is past the mill.
Access the towpath just past the mill. Turn
right onto the towpath to continue west.